

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE

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FOR AMBASSADOR JORDEN FROM CHRISTOPHER

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PN, SOPN

SUBJECT: TEXT OF EDITORIAL ENTITLED "THE PANAMA CANAL VOTE"

HEREWITH IS TEXT OF EDITORIAL, WASHINGTON POST, MARCH
16:

BEGIN TEXT: THE STRUGGLE IN THE SENATE OVER THE PANAMA
CANAL TREATIES HAS PROVIDED PROFILES IN JUST ABOUT EVERY-
THING--COURAGE AND COWARDICE, INTEGRITY AND EXPEDIENCY,
HONEST ANXIETY AND SQUALID AGGRAVATION OF WHAT IS APPARENT-
LY A RAW NERVE FOR A LOT OF AMERICANS. IT REMAINS FOR
SEN. BOB PACKWOOD (R-ORE.), BY WAY OF EXPLAINING THE OTHER
DAY HIS LATEST WOBBLE ON THE QUESTION, TO ADD TO THIS
CATALOGUE A PROFILE IN FATUITY. TAKING NOTE OF REPORTS
OF A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF BACK-SCRATCHING AND HORSE-TRADING
BY THE ADMINISTRATION ON BEHALF OF THE TREATIES, HE AD-
VANCED THE PROPOSITION THAT A FAVORABLE VOTE ON HIS PART
MIGHT "RATIFY THESE ALLEGED DEALS" AND SOMEHOW SANCTIFY
PRESIDENTIAL ARM-TWISTING AS AN ACCEPTED WAY OF DOING
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BUSINESS WITH THE CONGRESS. HEAVENS TO BETSY' DEALS?
IN THE SENATE? MR. PACKWOOD'S CONCERN FOR THE RECTITUDE

OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST DELIBERATIVE BODY IS TOUCHING.
HIS ESTIMATE OF THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF HIS VOTE ON
PRESIDENTIAL MORALITY IS IMPRESSIVE. BUT TO INTRODUCE
ALL THAT AS A REASON FOR REJECTING AN INTERNATIONAL

AGREEMENT THAT SHOULD PROPERLY STAND OR FALL ON ITS MERITS IS TO OFFER PERHAPS THE BEST EVIDENCE YET OF THE SENATE'S COMPULSION TO MAKE SOMETHING GRAND AND DRAMATIC AND COMPLICATED OUT OF A RELATIVELY MODEST ISSUE THAT CRIED OUT FROM THE BEGINNING FOR NOTHING MORE THAN A MAXIMUM OF LIGHT AND LEADERSHIP AND A BARE MINIMUM OF HEAT.

WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT THE CANAL ISSUE IS NOT COMPLEX. STILL LESS WOULD WE UNDERESTIMATE THE POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF NOT APPROVING THE TREATIES. IN THAT SENSE THERE IS A GREAT DEAL AT STAKE IN TODAY'S SCHEDULED VOTE ON THE FIRST OF THE TWO AGREEMENTS. WE WOULD LEAVE ASIDE WHAT IS AT STAKE IN TERMS OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE AT HOME AND IN THE CONDUCT OF FOREIGN POLICY ABROAD--ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT A DEFEAT ON WHAT HAS BEEN MADE SO LARGE AN ISSUE WOULD DO MR. CARTER CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE. BUT THAT IS NOT THE POINT; NO AMOUNT OF CONCERN OVER REAL OR IMAGINED INJURY TO THE CARTER PRESIDENCY WOULD JUSTIFY THE SENATE'S APPROVAL OF BAD TREATIES. THE POINT IS NOT EVEN WHETHER THE PROPOSAL TO RETURN THE CANAL, PROGRESSIVELY AND OVER A SPAN OF 22 YEARS TO PANAMANIAN CONTROL IS A BAD DEAL. THE REAL QUESTION IS WHETHER THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS WORKED OUT WITH PANAMA AFTER YEARS OF OFF-AGAIN-ON-AGAIN NEGOTIATIONS UNDER FOUR AMERICAN PRESIDENTS WOULD BE BETTER OR WORSE THAN THE ALTERNATIVE

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OF CONTINUING WITH A 75-YEAR YEAR-OLD TREATY THAT HAS BEEN THOROUGHLY OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS AND ROUNDLY REPUDIATED, IN EFFECT, BY THE RESULTS OF A REFERENDUM OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE. AND IN OUR VIEW, THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT IT--THE NEW TREATIES WOULD BETTER SERVE THIS COUNTRY'S SECURITY INTERESTS.

WE WILL NOT BURDEN YOU TODAY WITH ALL THE ARGUMENTS THAT WE SEE IN FAVOR OF THE TREATIES--WE'VE DONE THAT. THE TREATIES ARE NEITHER PERFECT NOR FOOLPROOF; NO AGREEMENTS MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY TO BOTH PARTIES IN A DISPUTE ARE EVER ENTIRELY SATISFACTORY TO EITHER ONE. SO WHAT YOU THINK OF THESE AGREEMENTS WILL DEPEND IN LARGE MEASURE ON YOUR ESTIMATE OF AMERICAN CAPABILITY TO ORDER EVENTS IN PANAMA--AND KEEP THE CANAL OPERATING--BY THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE. IT IS NOT A MATTER OF WILL, OR "MACHISMO", BUT OF DEPLOYING TROOPS OR SHIPS IN

A WAY THAT CAN OFFER REAL PROTECTION TO INTRICATE MACHINERY AND TO A 50-MILE-LONG, 10-MILE-WIDE STRIP OF TERRITORY. WE SHARE THE VIEW OF MOST OF THE MILITARY EXPERTS THAT THE CANAL IS EXTRAORDINARILY VULNERABLE AND

THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS UNINTERRUPTED OPERATION WILL BE GREATLY INFLUENCED BY THE STATE OF OUR RELATIONS WITH THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND BY THE STATE OF MIND OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE--NOT TO MENTION THE GOOD WILL AND RESPECT OF THE OTHER NATIONS OF THIS HEMISPHERE AND OF THE REST OF THE WORLD. EVEN IF THE TREATIES ARE APPROVED, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THERE WILL NOT BE TROUBLE. BUT IF THE TREATIES ARE REJECTED, THERE IS CERTAIN TO BE TROUBLE.

SO YOU COULD SAY THAT IT COMES DOWN TO THE QUESTION OF HOW YOU THINK THIS COUNTRY COULD BEST DEAL WITH TROUBLE IN THE PANAMA CANAL--BY RELYING ON THE TERMS OF THE OUTDATED AND WIDELY DISCREDITED TREATY NOW IN FORCE, OR BY PROCEEDING TO DEAL WITH WHATEVER CRISIS MAY DEVELOP ON UNCLASSIFIED

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THE BASIS OF NEW ARRANGEMENTS THAT HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE PANAMANIAN, THE COUNTRIES OF LATIN AMERICA AND MOST OF THE REST OF THE WORLD. THAT'S SOMETHING, IT SEEMS TO US, THAT SENATORS WHO WOULD VOTE TO KILL THE NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATIES OUGHT TO THINK A LITTLE ABOUT. THEY OUGHT TO ASK THEMSELVES HOW THEIR VOTES WILL BE PERCEIVED, NOT IF THINGS GO WELL AS A RESULT, BUT IF, AS IS FAR MORE LIKELY, THINGS GO QUITE SERIOUSLY WRONG. END OF TEXT. VANCE

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